

An account of the LIBER Emerging Leaders programme



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Background

The library profession within European research universities is challenged by a shortage of people who are both willing and have the skills to lead in an environment of increasingly fast-paced change.

Libraries will not be immune from the impact of global recession –far from it. They will need to be well equipped to deal with whatever new challenges are on the way. Our working lives are unlikely ever to return to ‘normal’ as we have come to know it.

Strong and effective leadership will be the key to the capacity of the profession to meet the demands of tomorrow’s customers, and to become partners alongside other leaders in our institutions as plans are made for the future. As the skills needed are changing, so will the type of director. The traditional profile will inevitably change in favour of more internationally oriented directors.

LIBER Emerging Leaders Programme

LIBER is an association of European research libraries. The LIBER Steering Committee on Organisation and Human Resources and the LIBER Leadership Working Group approved plans for a high-level three-stage seminar for the next generation of senior leaders in European research libraries, which was launched in 2011.

The programme is targeted at librarians at the second tier – people who are already in senior management positions, who are willing and capable of becoming library directors within a few years and taking responsibility for leading an organisation through changing times.

Course content

The programme offers a mix of courses and practical experience with the involvement of existing experienced research library directors, who are willing and committed LIBER members. It features a combination of high-level workshop / training with individual secondments and mentoring for a maximum of only twenty participants for each cohort.

The programme has four key components:

- an initial two-and-a-half-day session
- year to include one week’s mentorship in a European research library with a senior LIBER member and library director
- a year of Action Learning
- a second seminar of two-and-a-half further days prior to ‘graduation’

The first session is hosted in a different location each year. Action Learning Sets are established at that stage. During the year these sets communicate mostly by Skype, but may meet on occasion.

There are six modules in the programme:

- Module 1 Know yourself: self-awareness
- Module 2 Know your beliefs and values: leadership
- Module 3 Know where you are going: strategy (purpose and direction)
- Module 4 Take others with you: leading a high-performing team
- Module 5 Develop the performance of others: coaching for leaders
- Module 6 Continue your own development: action learning

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Application process

Applications, with supporting statements from library directors, are considered by the LIBER Organising Committee.

All successful candidates are expected to have:

- at least three years' experience in a middle management level post in a LIBER member research library
- working knowledge of spoken and written English
- evidence of motivation to move to a senior management post within next three years
- evidence of strong commitment to professional advancement
- recommendation from Director of employing library
- evidence of willingness and ability to undertake a short placement in a library in another LIBER library in a different country

Delegate costs are €650 each session (2 sessions).

Principles of the programme

The programme course director is Jan Wilkinson, who has enjoyed and experienced international exposure and whose career has been at the highest level, successfully encompassing all aspects of the profession in a wide variety of institutions. The course director acts as the 'glue' between the course content, to be designed and delivered by an experienced consultant & coach, also with international exposure and profile, and a small number of LIBER members as guest speakers who share their experiences to illustrate with practical examples the relevance of each part of the course.

An underpinning principle of the programme is the belief that effective leadership begins with self-discovery and self-knowledge; the programme begins with self-assessment (and use of the MBTI Type analysis) and feedback from other delegates in a range of exercises designed to capture this in an inclusive, participatory and non-threatening way. The programme recognises that leadership role models inform current perceptions of what a leader should do and say, and how personal beliefs about leadership and current ways of working may need to change.

The programme also challenges the delegates to have a vision, goals and a clear sense of their own purpose and direction, essential if they are to lead others. It addresses the need of leaders to win the commitment of others and to create and lead a high-performing team.

Developing others and engaging in continuing self-development is explored, with a focus on the skills required by and the pay-offs of taking a coaching approach to leadership. Delegates are introduced to the concept and practice of 'action learning', demonstrating the individual benefits of working within an 'action learning' group, inviting delegates to continue in an 'action learning' group as a lasting legacy of the programme.

The programme is participatory, engaging and fast-paced. The emphasis is on practical application and relevance, not theory; the light coverage of all of the essential material has plenty of recommended reading to allow follow-up in greater depth. The programme has an intake every two years, with approximately 22 people selected; thirteen European countries are represented to date, with almost 70 people having completed the programme.

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So far the programme has been oversubscribed and selection has had to be made with ever tightening criteria.

Conclusion

Feedback about the programme from the participants to date has been very positive, and LIBER continues to promote it to future generations of library directors.

Further information on the programme can be found at
<http://libereurope.eu/liber-leadership-development-programme/>

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